

## never talking about the thorns by 10pintsofsacrifice

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**Summary:**

Mike has a Not So Good Day.

## never talking about the thorns

### Author's Note:

warnings for pretty (?) graphic descriptions of menstruation, slight internalized transphobia, and panic attacks. please tread carefully!!

For most of your life, you'd lived in fear of the day you'd get your first period.

You know there's no stopping it, but you still feel a gut-wrenching terror when you think about it, knowing that when it starts it won't stop and then you'll be a girl like your dad said.

You're *not* a girl though. Your whole family is now very aware of this, making the switch over a few months, and now it's like you've never been called anything other than Mike. You're thankful to have a family that loves you.

It doesn't mean that you don't hear the slight resentment in your dad's voice when he calls you by your name, or the uncomfortable looks he sends you when you wear shorts and a vest instead of dresses on Sundays. You know full well what that means. He feels like he's lost his little girl even though he never took much interest in what you did, and he feels like he lost you even though he didn't, you're still you except just a little different.

You pretend it doesn't make you feel guilty, try to reassure yourself that it doesn't matter if he didn't like it, what matters is that this is you and this is how you're happy, even though you want him to be okay with it, to just accept that he has a son. It was a lot worse when you first came out, with him calling you confused and forcing you into this hyper-feminine persona, until Nancy actually screamed at him, and your mother backed her up.

You know you're never going to forget that, no matter what, and it sits heavy on your chest.

So you're terrified of "becoming a woman," even though you know

that you're a boy, and all boys like you that bleed are still boys, you're just afraid of what your relatives and immediate family will say. You don't want this, you don't want this. Your palms sweat and your heart races, you freeze up and are unable to speak, your stomach ties itself into tight knots. It doesn't help that you're disgusted at the idea of blood coming from there. Nancy answers all your questions, not once laughing at you or calling you dumb, while she rubbed your back and explained as much as she could to you. She tells you that there are, in fact, alternatives to tampons called pads and they just stick in your underwear. You have never felt so relieved.

You're still afraid, but you don't work yourself into anxiety attacks anymore, or at least not nearly as often as you used to.

You try not to think about it. You'll deal with it when the time comes to deal with it, and until then you want to remain as blissfully ignorant as possible, while you still have the chance.

Maybe it won't even be that bad, when it happens. Maybe it'll only be a slight inconvenience and life will continue on as usual.

It's not as though you can talk about it with your friends, because although you trust them you're at a certain age and those kinds of things are Gross, even to you. El doesn't know what they are really, and she won't get one, as she and you are in the same situation but with opposite identities. Nancy seems like the only one to understand, if you're being honest.

You tell yourself that it'll be okay, you don't have to deal with it by yourself, when it happens; you have your sister and mom. You still occasionally work yourself into panicked stomachaches. You've picked your nails until they're bloody, bitten your lip until scabs formed, zoned out so badly you'd tripped off the curb and got such bad scrapes your mom asked if someone fought with you.

That's another thing.

(You're pretty sure there's something wrong with you, because kids get nervous but not *this* nervous, and it happens all the time whether you want it to or not. It even happens in non-stressful situations, to

your complete annoyance and utter confusion, and you can't turn it off, can't make it stop and can't calm down. Sometimes you cry; others you scream. Sometimes you just shut off.

God, you've got way too much to think about right now, honestly.)

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You're at Will's house when you get the worst cramps of your life, low in your belly and enough to make you fold for a minute, pressing your hands to your stomach like it'll help. You excuse yourself - just say you might be a little sick, no one needs to worry about you right now, and you see Will's eyes flash but he nods and says his mom is inside if you need her.

El's eyes are soft with concern, and she offers to get you inside, but you wave her off gently - tell her it's alright, you've got it, you just might throw up. She looks even more worried at that, but she nods slowly and relents.

You keep your arms wrapped around your middle in a vice grip, the pressure seeming to help. Ms. Byers takes one look at you and pads over, her arm around your shoulders; she leads you to the bathroom and tells you she'll be waiting outside, in case she needs to call Nancy or your mom to come get you.

You shut the door with shaking hands and run your hands through your hair. The panic is starting to settle in the pit of your stomach, electric anxiety pulsing in the tips of your fingers and in your throat, and for a moment you consider the uncomfortable possibility that you're really sick and have to go to the hospital.

You flap your hands for a few moments to see if that dispels some of the anxious energy in you, but it proves unsuccessful and your heart rate rises, eyes burning, and you beg yourself not to have a breakdown in the Byers' bathroom.

You pace for a little bit to try and ease your caginess a little, and stop dead in your tracks when a warm gross feeling makes itself known, and you realize with a fair amount of horror that it definitely isn't piss.

You immediately sit yourself down to check yourself down, and nearly break down on the spot when you see dark red blood in your underwear, barely biting back a terrified scream by sinking your teeth into your lip. The tears come faster than you can stop them, and Ms. Byers knocks on the door to ask if you're okay, and you debate internally what to tell her. How do you calmly tell one of your best friends' mother that you think you're dying, because you're bleeding far too much for it to be normal, and you're not supposed to bleed from there anyway? For a moment you turn it over before the realization hits and you feel both stupid and even *more* afraid.

You're bleeding from that place. Of course it had to be right here and right now, without Nancy by your side to calm you down and help you deal with it. You pull your pants back up uncomfortably before you open the bathroom door a crack.

"I-I, um," you mutter, hands twisted in the hem of your shirt, fear crawling up your spine as you stand and bleed. "D-do you maybe, uh, have a pad that I can u-use? I think, um. I think that I just, uh, got my period."

"Oh, of course," she says, and there's no hesitation or questioning in her voice when she replies, voice full of soft motherly concern that makes your heart clench.

"Just wait there for a moment - I know where they are, let me get them - are you okay?"

You can't really speak so you just hum in confirmation and hope that she gets it. You're not really okay but you will be.

"Mike, it's - it's okay that this happened," Ms. Byers tells you when she gets back, slipping a pad through the crack in the door. "It doesn't, you know...make you less of a boy, if that's what you think. You're still Michael no matter what, unless you change your mind. This doesn't make you any different, it's just the way your body works."

You blink away the sudden blurriness, swiping your hand over your eyes. This is fine. "...Thank you," you manage. "I'm sorry that I - I'm sorry. Um."

“Don’t be sorry,” she says, and your gratefulness triples when she hands you a pair of clean underwear, still not intruding on your space and respecting the way the door is hiding you. You hold them to your chest, shaking your head to dissuade the tears from rolling down your cheeks and biting your lip. “It’s just a thing that happens, and it’s alright that it happens, just make sure you tell your mom or Nancy. And I’m always here too.”

You feel your chest hum with gentle comfort, feeling genuinely soothed by her words and reassurances. She sounds worried - admittedly it makes you feel kind of bad, because you know she has plenty to deal with, but she seems genuinely concerned about your wellbeing and it comforts you. You thank her again, and she tells you she’ll be close if you need her, and it makes you smile as you close the door, legs still shaking horribly and feeling a little unhinged, but you feel noticeably calmer than you did before.

You know that your clothes are going to stain, but you doubt your mom is going to be mad at you for it. Your lower stomach is still swarmed with dull warm pain, but at least you know why and can probably help it when you get home, and you make the smart decision to throw your other pair of underwear away.

Ms. Byers helps you into your hoodie, despite you telling her it’s okay. The softness is grounding after a few moments, and you thank her at least four more times, to all of which she just replies with a smile and a wave. She ruffles your hair and hugs you. Then she sends you back outside to your friends’ more than concerned faces, Dustin looking on the verge of panic and Lucas comforting him, and Will sends you a shaky smile but when you sit down with them they know everything’s alright.

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The next day you end up being in so much pain you barely want to move. You call Will and El up on your radio, since you know Dustin and Lucas both happen to be busy. They both agree to bike over and bring sweet foods - after Ms. Byers confirms they can go, of course, like she would ever refuse. After that you just wait for them, snuggling deeper into your nest of blankets - you hadn’t really slept well the night before so you’d just made yourself a little soft pile with

all your blankets. Normally the heat would be far too much for you to handle, but: It turns out that along with the medicine that your mom gave you the heat helps, kind of takes the edge off the aches.

Your mom frowns at you sympathetically. She says she figured it wouldn't be very fun the first time and that Nancy was like this, albeit being a little older than you at the time. The both of you act pretty much the same way though.

By the time El and Will get there, you don't feel like moving, and luckily they understand and make their way to you, both of them padding in quietly and carefully. They frown when they see your overly-tired expression. El gently pushes you back against the bed and onto your pillow, telling you to lie back and relax.

You hum when Will weaves a hand through your hair and just plays with it, soft touches and gentle murmurs - he and El make their way under all the heavy blankets and lay on either side of you. You enjoy the comfort of both of them right beside you (like it was meant to be), and they both take one of your hands to hold (like it was meant to be).

"Today is a Cuddle Mike day," El murmurs, sighing hotly over your collarbone. "Joyce sorta explained it to us. We know you're not feeling well."

"I'm pretty sure that stomach flu was worse," you mumble softly. "But this isn't, y'know, good."

Will squeezes your hand and presses a gentle kiss to your neck, causing a quiet giggle to escape you. "Yeah."

The three of you go quiet, not in an uncomfortable way but in a sleepy sort of way - all tangled up in each other, the way it goes most days, Will's free hand in your hair and El tucked into your neck.

"I'm super tired."

Laughing, El nudges you. "Then sleep. We'll be right here."

Will nods. "Promise."

You let out a long sigh, burying yourself further into your blankets.

You hear a soft giggling and you turn your head to meet Will's lips. You - you giggle, and Will can't help giggling either so you have to part. El is next and she's soft but before you can move away she blows a raspberry on your neck. You snort and try to bury yourself underneath a mountain of blankets for protection.

However they work together to keep you above and right where they want you - you can only giggle and surrender to the countless kisses, taking a deep breath once they finally stop.

Your eyes burn with sleepiness. They tell you it's okay - that if you want to sleep, then you can sleep - so you let your eyes fall shut. It's nice to just be with them like this, warm and tired and comforted by them being so close. Even though you're in pain this almost makes up for it.

And then suddenly, Will gives you a raspberry on your other side, and you don't do anything but sigh loudly and fondly. Despite these two being nerds, they're good nerds, and the three of you manage to fall asleep after that.